

SERMON NOTES

National Presbyterian Church, Washington, DC
Dr. David A. Renwick

Probing Questions I. The Bible: Out of Date?

Writings Impacting this sermon

1. Achtemeier, Paul J. Canon, Inspiration and Authority, 1980/99
2. Barton, John How The Bible Came to Be, 1997
3. Bruce, F.F. The New Testament. Documents: Are They Reliable? 1943/81
4. Ehrman, Bart D. Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why, 2005
5. Keefer, Kyle The NT as Literature, 2008
6. Keller, Timothy The Reason for God, Timothy Keller, 2008
7. Hitchens, Christopher God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything, 2007
8. Dawkins, Richard The God Delusion, 2006
9. The Children's Bible in 365 Stories

PROBLEMS:

Old Testament:

'a nightmare' (Hitchens); 'a barbaric bronze age text' (Vidal)

New Testament:

'exceeds the evil of the Old Testament' (Hitchens)

Forming the Bible

A conspiracy by men who excluded what they didn't like (Dan Brown)

The Text Itself

'riddled with inconsistencies and outright forgeries,'

'hundreds of thousands of textual changes' (Ehrman)

THE PRESBYTERIAN CONSTITUTION

Confession of 1967:

The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of **its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ.**

The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current.

The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. As God has spoken his word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that **he will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.**

Presbyterian Officer/Minister Vow:

"I accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be by the Spirit the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ and God's word to me."

AN APPROACH

1. Remember the Purpose

- A. Not intended to be a scientific text book, nor strict history, but deliberately written to
- i. 'witness to Jesus Christ: (John 20:30-31)
 - a. 4 Gospels: each different, like 4 portraits
 - b. Would more consistency help? Or would it look like collusion?
 - ii. be a channel of God's Word to us in every day and age
- B. The Bible still fulfils its purpose today
- i. e.g., Indian Bishop John Subhan . . . came to Christ
 - ii. 2 Timothy 3:16 . . . 'useful for teaching, reproof, correction, to equip God's people for every good work'

2. Remember the Meaning of Inspiration

- A. Inspired by God does not mean perfect in every way:
The Bible is perfect/sufficient for its purpose, but we set ourselves up for valid criticism if we claim that it is perfect in every way (*e.g., at the least: there is bad grammar in the Bible!!*)
- B. Inspired by God does not mean that God intends for us to read the Bible 'literally' – but thoughtfully and carefully. In fact . . . ***No one I know always reads the Bible literally!!***
- i. See Leviticus 20:9? or Psalm 23:1 (is poetry 'literal'?)
 - ii. The Problem of translation from Greek and Hebrew
. בְּרָאשִׁית, בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים και θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος
Every translation is a human interpretation
- C. Inspired means the Bible functions *like our U.S. history and Constitution . . .* We may not agree on the exact content of our history or the way to interpret the constitution, but
- i. they bind us together as a people . . .
 - ii. and provide a boundary for our debates . . .
 - iii. on what we believe as a people, and how we are to live.
- D. Inspired means we read it anyway! As Jesus did (Luke 4)
There is No Excuse for Ignorance! (at the least, read a Children's Bible!!)